

Excerpts from my field diary (July 2009 onwards)

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“Suruj Laha”, Tendu, Heat waves and forest in summer.

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“Who says that it is not right time to visit forest? Although it is peak summer and heat waves are eager to kill but still Symphorema, Diospyros, Madhuca, Wrightia, Ixora, Buchanania and tens of species are at flowering and fruiting. It is best time to visit to these species after taking all risks. And that’s why we are here.” I was explaining it to my friend visiting forest for the first time for surveys. It was April 21, 2010. No one was in forest. Villages were empty. No wildlife but trees were there waiting for us. The Traditional Healers were with us. Although we were taking interest in all species but the main purpose was to collect seeds from Symphorema climber. These seeds are used in Traditional Healing. The Healers add it in number of formulations.



“See it carefully. Even in peak summer this climber is flowering and fruiting. No one is here to provide water to it. Species present in its surroundings have almost died but it is flourishing. It indicates that it is one of the promising remedies for diseases common in summer days.” The Healers tried to explain. *Symphorema involucreatum* is present in different parts of Chhattisgarh but it is not a common species. It is not in trade. Also, not collected in bulk for preparation of medicine by natives. It is wrong to assume that *Symphorema* possess less medicinal properties. In fact, very few Healers are aware of its medicinal uses. They use it round the year. I have documented their knowledge regarding medicinal uses of this species.





In different parts it is known by different names. In Chhattisgarh Plains the Healers name it as “Suruj Laha.” Suruj means Sun and Laha means climber. They consider it as Gift of Sun God. They use it in one and another way in treatment of diseases due to improper heat balance inside body.



The ancient as well as modern world literatures give less information about medicinal uses of this species but the Healers of Chhattisgarh know much about it although they share little. This is the reason that most of the knowledge about this species is still in undocumented form.



The Healers collected seeds. “Now our mission is over. When we visit to forest by foot or bicycle it takes many days to collect seeds in this quantity. Visit to forest in cool car we have collected it in few hours.” They said with joy.

Although we were taking water in bulk but none of us urinated for many hours. We were surprising that where so much water is going? The Healers warned that this is not good symptom. You must either drink more water or take Tendu fruits in bulk.

We started for forest after taking routine breakfast. The Healers took famous “Bore Basi” before joining us. They were feeling cool even in hot summer and much more active than us even after hard work of seed collection. We moved forward to part of forest having rich population of Tendu trees.

Surprisingly this year fruits are very less in Tendu trees. The Healers give many reasons for this poor fruiting. After efforts of one hour we got few matured fruits, enough to protect our bodies from heat waves. “We must leave some fruits for other visitors like monkeys and birds.” They said.

After getting refreshed we started for next destination.



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